

Recently, when I was substitute teaching in a local school, I came across a very unusual creature. It was an Australian leaf bug. It was in the elementary classroom, along with(1) other animals such as a corn snake, a hamster, and an old display of tarantulas, moths, and beetles. This particular(2) insect didn't catch my eye at all at first because it was perfectly camouflaged. It was hanging from a raspberry branch, but it was so still, and looked so much like a dry leaf, that I thought there were no creatures in the cage at all. I asked the students about their classroom pets, and they had lots to say. They called the bugs, "gross", "wierd", "freaky", and even "boring". "They don't do much," said one boy. "They just hang there all day. They eat, and they poop, and that's all." I took a video of one of them and then looked them up on the internet. I found out that they are not as boring as they seem(3). They live a long time: 18 months for females, and about 6 months for males. The females produce huge amounts of eggs, and what's amazing is that(4)they don't even need the males. If there is no male, their eggs will all be female bugs; it's called parthenogenesis. The females are also twice as big as the males, but unlike them, they cannot fly. Poor males, they may as well fly if they're not needed. So, for a classroom, the female Australian bug is an ideal and easy pet: cheap, durable, static, and 'wierd'.

1. 'Along with' is similar to saying 'as well as' or 'close to'.

- a. Cats are perfect hunters. They are fast, quiet, and along with their sharp claws, they have nocturnal vision.
- b. The kitchen draw was a mess. In it were coins, wires, papers, and pins, along with old receipts and pebbles.

2. 'This particular..' is a useful short phrase used to emphasize a noun that you then describe.

- a. There was a man in the crowd in a red coat. This particular man was well known.
- b. Snakes can dislocate their jaws; this particular ability enables them to eat animals larger than themselves.

3. 'as .....as' practicing comparisons:

- a. He's as tall as the man.
- b. It's as sunny as it was yesterday.
- c. She's as capable as anyone in the class.

4. 'What's amazing is that..' Here, 'amazing' can be replaced with any adjective, and often 'that' is omitted in speech, and after 'who', 'when', 'where', 'how' and 'why', or the infinitive or gerund of a verb.

- a. What's tragic is (that) he doesn't study for his tests.
- b. What's funny is how he eats so fast.
- c. What's encouraging is seeing their progress.

5. 'Durable' means that it either lives a long time, or that it doesn't wear with age or use.

- a. The new, efficient light bulbs are durable; they last up to 7 years.
- b. those cheap tires are not durable; they'll wear out in a year or two.

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